



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Local Government and Communities Committee

Wednesday 5 February 2020

Session 5



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Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

5th Meeting 2020, Session 5

CONVENER

*James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Annabelle Ewing (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)

*Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP)

*Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con)

*Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

*Andy Wightman (Lothian) (Green)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Kevin Stewart (Minister for Local Government, Housing and Planning)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Peter McGrath

LOCATION

The James Clerk Maxwell Room (CR4)

Scottish Parliament

Local Government and Communities Committee

Wednesday 5 February 2020

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:45]

Subordinate Legislation

Fuel Poverty (Additional Amount in respect of Remote Rural Area, Remote Small Town and Island Area) (Scotland) Regulations 2020 [Draft]

Fuel Poverty (Enhanced Heating) (Scotland) Regulations 2020 [Draft]

The Convener (James Dornan): Good morning, and welcome to the Local Government and Communities Committee's fifth meeting in 2020. I remind everyone present to turn off their mobile phones. We have received apologies from Sarah Boyack.

Under agenda item 1, the committee will take evidence on the draft Fuel Poverty (Additional Amount in respect of Remote Rural Area, Remote Small Town and Island Area) (Scotland) Regulations 2020 and the draft Fuel Poverty (Enhanced Heating) (Scotland) Regulations 2020. I welcome from the Scottish Government Kevin Stewart, the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Planning. He is accompanied from the Scottish Government by Lynn Forsyth, who is the head of fuel poverty policy, Adam Krawczyk, who is the head of housing, homelessness and regeneration analysis, and Alison Fraser, who is a solicitor.

The instruments have been laid under affirmative procedure, which means that Parliament must approve them before the provisions can come into force. Following this evidence session, the committee will consider motions to approve the instruments. I invite the minister to make a short opening statement.

The Minister for Local Government, Housing and Planning (Kevin Stewart): Thank you for inviting me here to talk about the latest regulations that we are bringing forward under the Fuel Poverty (Targets, Definition and Strategy) (Scotland) Act 2019. The Scottish statutory instruments that the committee is considering will put in place the final elements of the new definition of fuel poverty, and will allow us to calculate whether a household is in fuel poverty.

I will start with the Fuel Poverty (Additional Amount in respect of Remote Rural Area, Remote Small Town and Island Area) (Scotland) Regulations 2020. As, I am sure, you all remember, I agreed during the passage of the 2019 act that we would introduce an uplift to the minimum income standard for households in remote rural, remote small town and island communities, with a separate uplift for islands. That is to account for the generally higher costs of living in those areas.

The regulations will do two things. First, they define precisely what the terms "remote rural area", "remote small town" and "island area" refer to. Secondly, they specify who is going to calculate the amounts of the MIS uplifts. We believe that the six-fold Scottish Government urban rural classification provides a suitable existing set of criteria to define remote rural areas and remote small towns, based on population size and driving time from settlements of 10,000 people and above. For island areas, we have replicated the definition in the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018, which allows us to calculate a separate MIS uplift for island communities.

The regulations confirm that the centre for research in social policy at Loughborough University will be appointed to calculate the amounts by which the MIS will be uplifted. Given its established expertise in developing and compiling the MIS for the whole United Kingdom, it was the obvious choice for the role.

The Fuel Poverty (Enhanced Heating) (Scotland) Regulations 2020 set out what types of households will have an enhanced heating regime applied in calculating whether they are in fuel poverty. Before I touch on the enhanced heating regimes, I note that the application of an enhanced heating regime is not a proxy for fuel poverty. It is only part of the calculation; it does not confer a real-life benefit on the household. Rather, the enhanced heating regimes recognise that some households are likely to have higher fuel bills because they are more vulnerable to the effects of being a poorly heated home, or need to be at a slightly higher temperature due to people's age, illness or disability. We want to ensure that those additional costs can be taken into account when calculating whether households are in fuel poverty.

The 2019 act provides for three possible enhanced heating regimes: enhanced heating temperatures, enhanced heating hours, or both combined. That increased range of heating regimes will enable us to broaden the household characteristics that will cause one of the regimes to be applied. We put our proposals for the enhanced heating regimes out for consultation last summer and held a number of focus groups that

included people with lived experience of fuel poverty.

The final criteria, which are set out in the regulations, have taken on board the responses that we got from those consultation efforts. In particular, we have revised, by raising the maximum age to 5 years, our original proposal to apply longer hours of heating to households that include children aged 3 years or under, where the home is occupied regularly during weekdays.

Once the two SSIs have been confirmed, all elements of the new definition will have been commenced and we will be able to concentrate on the most important task, which is to get people out of fuel poverty.

The Convener: Thank you, minister. As members have no questions, we move to formal consideration of the motions.

Motion moved,

That the Local Government and Communities Committee recommends that the Fuel Poverty (Additional Amount in respect of Remote Rural Area, Remote Small Town and Island Area) (Scotland) Regulations 2020 [draft] be approved.—[Kevin Stewart]

Motion agreed to.

The Convener: The committee will report on the instrument in due course.

Motion moved,

That the Local Government and Communities Committee recommends that the Fuel Poverty (Enhanced Heating) (Scotland) Regulations 2020 [draft] be approved.—[Kevin Stewart]

Motion agreed to.

The Convener: The committee will report on the instrument in due course. I invite the committee to delegate authority to me, as convener, to approve a draft of the SSI report for publication.

Members indicated agreement.

Meeting closed at 09:51.

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